DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 028 504 EA 002 101

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Coping with Racial Imbalance.

Pub Date 17 Feb 69

Note-12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Amer. Assn. of School Admin. (101st, Atlantic City, N.J., Feb. 17, 1969).

EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.70

Descriptors-*Administrator Role, Black Power, Board of Education Role, Curriculum, Equal Education, Integration Methods, *Public Schools, *Racial Balance, *Racial Integration, Racism, *School Integration, Superintendent Role

Little progress is being made in our attempt to cope with racial imbalance in the public schools. Perhaps we are not serious about solving the problem, because if we were, we would not have more children in segregated classrooms today than we had at the time of the 1954 Supreme Court decision. All too often it is the school administrator who is the major deterent to progress. School administrators must take the initiative in pressing for the removal of racial imbalance. Minority groups can tolerate being put off for just so long, and the black separatist movement is a direct result of our inaction. If we continue down the separatist track in education we will have two separate and unequal societies which will end up shooting at each other. This can be prevented if we want to prevent it. Steps in the solution must include having one curriculum for all children, promoting the concept of "black identity," and unraveling the warped and biased rules of society that really only fit the white, middle class. School administrators must determine to cope with racial imbalance by having the courage to discharge the responsibility they have chosen. Children and society can not wait for their elders to overcome bigotry and prejudice. (TT)

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COPING WITH RACIAL IMBALANCE

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for the
101st Annual Convention of the
American Association of School Administrators

Atlantic City, New Jersey
February 17, 1969

EA 002 101

COPING WITH RACIAL IMBALANCE

> ". . .There are those who are frightened by the challenges of desegregation. They would follow the counsel of despair voiced by black and white separatists alike--maintain segregated schools and abandon the dream of achieving a fully integrated society. This, of course, would solve none of the dilemmas (of coping with racial imbalance) and would only push them underground once again to be tackled by a future, braver generation. . ."[1]

This statement, made by a researcher, not a school administrator, contains a prophecy which at this writing appears to be all too accurate. We don't seem to be making progress as we attempt to cope with racial imbalance, or perhaps in far too many instances we are not attempting to cope with it at all.

If wewere really serious about solving this problem we would not have more children in segregated classrooms today--both black and white--than we had in 1954. Perhaps the reason for this condition rests in the explanation given by Singer and Hendrick in an article in Phi Delta Kappan in November of 1967.[2] They say,

> ". . .A number of articles appearing in the professional literature of late have acknowledged, usually unhappily, that while there has been no shortage of citizen committee recommendations and community studies, resolute drives to end segregated schools have neither been very numerous nor very resolute. . .Reasons for these lethargic attempts at desegregation are complicated, although it is still probably safe to conjecture that lack of societal commitment is still the leading explanation. . .Resistance to reform may be attributed to the fiscal cost of desegregation and to a variety of fears expressed by individuals hostile to the idea. . ."

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1. Jane R. Mercer, "Issues and Dilemmas in School Desegregation: A Case Study," Report of proceeding at the 17th annual Western Regional Conference on Testing Problems, San Francisco, California, May 3, 1968, page 21.

2. H. Singer, I.G. Hendrick, "Total School Integration: An Experiment in Social Reconstruction," Phi Delta Kappan, November 1967.

Perhaps these are the reasons, and perhaps they're not! There can be no question about the role that fear plays in this resistance to desegregation. It's paramount--"fears expressed by individuals." But what individuals, and what decision making power do these individuals have? It appears to me that all too often it is the school administrator's fear which is the major deterent to progress.

There are exceptions, several of whom are on this panel, but these men appear to be in a small minority. Although I am not well acquainted with all of our panelists, I do know Charles Richter, Neil Sullivan, and Greg Anrig.

I know that Charles Richter was not satisfied to preside comfortably over the schools of the almost all-white city of West Hartford, Connecticut. (That city of 70,000 people does have 16 black families!) Recognizing the element of cultural deprivation which white segregation represented for his children, and recognizing the cultural deprivation of all black schools in the inner city of Hartford, he put his job on the line to lead the thrust for a cooperative metropolitan plan which enables several hundred black children from Hartford to be bused to West Hartford for their education. This kind of leadership takes courage, especially when you consider the fact that West Hartford is all-white because thousands of people who live there made it that way, and many want to keep it that way. It takes courage to face 1,200 angry people in an auditorium and tell them precisely what they do not want to hear. I'm sure Dr. Richter will be glad to tell you more about this exciting program.

Another approach to coping with racial imbalance is exemplified by another of our panelists, Neil Sullivan. Until recently Neil was superintendent of schools in Berkeley, California, a small city which

has implemented what I consider to be the most ambitious desegregation program in the country. Virtually all of the children in Berkeley are or will be bused to school during their school careers. Disadvantaged minority group children are bused from the flatlands to the previously all-white schools in the hills, and affluent hill dwellers are bused to the schools in the flatlands which were previously occupied by their less affluent school mates--predominantly of two minority groups, Negro and Oriental. This is real two-way busing, a plan developed and implemented under Neil Sullivan's leadership, in spite of vigorous opposition carried to the point of a recall election for some of his supporters on the board of education. Neil has now taken his creative talent and guts to Massachusetts, where he hopes to persuade some of that fine state's towns and cities to follow Berkeley's example. Good luck in Boston, Neil!

Metropolitanism and cross-city busing are two of many methods that have been developed to cope with racial imbalance. Several other methods can be described by a third panelist, Greg Anrig. As one of former Education Commissioner Harold Howe's chief aides, Greg Anrig has worked with cities and towns throughout this country in attempts to cope with racial imbalance. Like his former boss, a man of strong convictions backed up by an ample supply of courage, Greg has faced the wrath of local segregationists and probably has stood toe to toe with congressional opponents of the enforcement provisions of the Civil Rights Act. For his sake and ours, I hope he hasn't worked himself out of a job. Perhaps we can get him to comment on that subject in a few minutes?

As of right now I'm not sure where Mr. Finch and his boss stand on the question of coping with racial imbalance. The secretary's administrative decision of January 30 with regard to the withholding of funds leaves

the question in doubt, yet the choice of James E. Allen, Jr. as under-secretary and as Doc Howe's replacement certainly is a most auspicious one. Jim Allen clearly demonstrated in his New York State commissioner-ship his dedication and zeal with regard to integration, and we are delighted with his appointment.

But I can't help wondering if the President will advocate 1,000 more teachers for the Washington public schools as readily as he called for 1,000 more policemen in Washington. Both are necessary if we are to have justice along with law and order.

As a matter of fact, I'll go one step further--without truly equal educational opportunities for all boys and girls, we can never have law and order, no matter how many policemen we hire or how many national guardsmen we bring into the cities in times of crisis. But that subject leads to another sermon, and this one is already too long.

If I preach too many sermons I'm apt to end up as a cellmate with "cousin Bill" in Boston. Don't get me wrong. While advocating courage for school administrators, I do not think it's necessary to go to jail to prove that you have it. However, I do think that school administrators have to be willing to rock the boat if they expect to cope with racial imbalance at all. Moreover, I think that they have to take the initiative to rock the boat first, unless they would like to have someone else tip the boat over for them.

Last month I spent five hours on the witness stand in the U. S. District Court in Chicago. The U. S. Attorney General's office was pressing its case against the Board of Education of South Holland, Illinois, a small suburb of Chicago. Perhaps you read in the papers where District Court Judge Julius Hoffman ordered South Holland to desegregate its schools

last summer. In this case the former superintendent, Charles Watt, rocked this little Dutch boat and the board of education threw him out. (He's now teaching at George Peabody College, so you can see that he didn't drown.) However, my guess is that Judge Hoffman will tip that South Holland boat upside down, that the present board of education all will drown, and that they may pull down the whole school system with them. This may happen in Mt. Vernon, New York, too, and in similiar cities around the country.

Another alternative to refusing to cope realistically with racial imbalance has already been written in the history books. Singer and Hendrick refer to this one when they say,

> ". . .Virtually all decisions to step up the desegregation process appear to have come as a result of either legal threat or through pressure applied by social reformers and distraught minority citizens. . ."[3]

The authors go on to describe what happened in Riverside, California, prior to the adoption of that city's integration program. Here plans for a large scale boycott were well advanced, part of a school burned down, and

> "attempts by the board president and school officials to avert it (the boycott) were rebuffed vehemently. Promises would no longer suffice. . ."[4]

Riverside is not the only city in which this and far more dramatic measures have been taken. They have occurred all over the country, usually with justification. People can tolerate being put off for just so long, and 1954 was a long time ago.

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3. Ibid., page 143.

4. Ibid., page 144.

Many people today are decrying the black separatist movement. Others are using it to support their own segregationist views. However, those who decry it have no one to blame but themselves. Had we coped with racial imbalance 15 years ago, when the Supreme Court told us to do so, the separatist movement might never have occurred. I don't think that the separatist movement in its present form is necessarily bad; however, it can be. If we go down the separatist track in education all the way we will ultimately have two school systems, one all black and the other all white. These won't resemble the segregated school system of an earlier time. Here will be two curricula--one black and one white. Some of the black schools will become schools for violent revolution, and some of the white schools will become training grounds for 20th Century "minute men." Thus the ominous predictions of the Kerner Report[5] will be converted to self-fulfilling prophecies; we'll have two separate and unequal societies which will end up shooting at each other.

Certainly this can be prevented, if we want to prevent it. It seems to me that it is terribly important that we have a single curriculum and that it be the right kind of a curriculum--one from which white racism has been eliminated, but not one in which black racism has been substituted. It is important to have one curriculum for all children. Let me note a specific: White youngsters need to know about the contributions of black people to America, just as the black children need to know it. No one would deny that the distortions of history have hurt the black child in the past, but to distort history in a new direction would also hurt him.

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5. Otto Kerner, Chairman, Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, March 1968.

At the same time, developing "black identity" can be beneficial to black children. We have learned that promoting the "black is beautiful" concept in school is good as we work from desegregation to integration. Black children can write on the important thought of "I'm black and I'm proud." They can express it in drama, in discussions, and in art. The idea has a noticeable impact on them. When they feel beautiful, they look beautiful, to both white and black.

An article in the New York Times a couple of weeks ago described the phenomenon at the college level. The headline on the article was "Racial Diversity Unsettles Wesleyan."[6] The story starts out:

"To the frustration of some of its white liberal administrators. . ." It goes on to describe how Wesleyan, a small college in Connecticut long known for its academic excellence, has moved from virtually no Negroes in its student body to nearly 9% this year--higher than almost any other private Eastern College. The blacks now eat together, room together--when they're sophomores and can choose their own roommates--and now some of them will not even speak to whites. Whites don't like this, especially white liberals. But we created the conditions which brought it about.

Now we resent the new self-awareness, a self-awareness previously undeveloped because we, the white people, had repressed it from the days of slavery, or before, to the present. Thus, we may deplore separatism, but we must assume the major responsibility for its genesis.

At a recent conference on critical issues in education sponsored by the NEA under Libby Koontz' leadership, attended by some 400 educators and noneducators, the three "R's" of today were recognized--racism, re-

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6. "Racial Diversity Unsettles Wesleyan," The New York Times, January 31, 1969.

sponsiveness and relevancy. It was interesting, too, that as is the case with all societal groups at present, a black caucus group convened itself from those present at the meeting--thus giving a reality to the talk and some practice in situations simulating the "real world."

And if we take an honest look at the real world, we see clearly that while we may have talked about "one set of rules for everyone," we have so warped and biased the "rules" that they really only fit the white, middle class. Edgar Z. Friedenberg in the current Atlantic says that the

> "most politically effective defense of racism consists not in a futile attempt to impute genetic inferiority to black people, but in a withholding of generosity by refusing to break its 'network of small, complicated rules' in order to recognize their plight and redress their grievances. . ."[7]

The black job applicant facing the standard employment criteria--educational, grammatical, etc.--and the white employment manager must feel like the very short or very tall draftee facing the supply sergeant handing out size 40 clothing--to everyone. Whether we construct clothing or rules, we better make sure that we take everyone's measurements into account.

Incidentally, the March issue of School Management magazine contains a great story on the black administrator. Friendenburg's concept is discussed in some detail--by black administrators in American public schools.[8]

And do some constructing we must. We, as school administrators, must make up our minds to "cope with racial imbalance." Not to ignore it, or be afraid of it, or excuse it, or think that the problem will solve itself, because it won't.

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7. Edgar Z. Friedenberg, "The Hidden Costs of Opportunity," The Atlantic, February 1969, pg. 84-90.

8. School Management, March 1969.

The decision facing the superintendent is really far easier than that facing board members. The superintendent has chosen his profession because he has a deep and abiding interest in educating boys and girls. Moreover, in rising to the superintendency he has demonstrated some of the essential qualities of leadership--intellectual ability, integrity, energy, initiative, and courage. He has been appointed to lead his board of education and his community toward the best possible education for all children in his district. Therefore, if he reads even narrowly in his own professional journals, he has learned that desegregation and eventual integration are essential if he is to discharge the basic responsibility of the job.

There should be no doubt about his commitment to integration. If there is, he does not deserve to be a superintendent. He should do everything within his power to convince his board of education to act on desegregation. To do less makes him unworthy of the role and responsibility he has accepted.

The board member's decision is slightly more complex, primarily because board members seem to hold one of two divergent points of view.

Some think that they have been elected to reflect the wishes of the people--a majority of their constituency. Others, undoubtedly the minority on this issue, accept the fact that they have been elected to lead the people, and to direct the superintendent if he needs leading.

The paradoxical point is that many board members adhere to the second position in all issues except integration. They make and adopt budgets without reference to their constituency; they approve textbooks and curricula; appoint personnel and fix their salaries; build schools, and govern the school system--all without recourse or reference to the

opinions of those who elected them. Yet when the issue of integration comes up, they say "the voters don't want it."

Board members who care more about being reelected than they do about the results they produce while they are in office, who care more about the status and power associated with the position than about the welfare of the boys and girls in their charge, often are unwilling to take a position in favor of desegregation. Yet this is the only position which is educationally and morally right for their communities and their country.

Some boards, though few, have taken such a position. It's heartening to think of the board in Great Neck, Long Island. that voted three to two for integration despite a referendum in which voters voted five to four against integration! We admire greatly the leadership Great Neck Superintendent and AASA President John Miller showed in helping guide the board to the decision to bring children together for their education.

If we changed every other institution in the country, the schools alone would perpetuate separation, since it is while children are of school age that they develop the basic attitudes they will carry with them the rest of their lives.

It's for this reason that we have to change our position. We have to <u>cope</u> with racial imbalance, not ignore it. We have to be leaders, not followers. We have to realize that a creative approach to the challenges of desegregation may lead in many directions. In Riverside, and in Evanston, and in Berkeley, and in White Plains, and in Syracuse, desegregation has been an energizing force on the entire school system. Desegregation has given impetus to many new programs and new ideas which are leading to better opportunities for all children.

In each of these cities the superintendent has not necessarily been the initiator. But, once started, he has been a leader. He hasn't looked to see what side today's personal bread is buttered on. He looked at children, all children, and cast his lot with their educational welfare rather than with apparent power blocs of the moment. Unfortunately, one need only pick up a daily newpaper to see that this is not the common pattern. Yet it should be, indeed it must be, if we are to survive as a nation.

Changing the prevailing pattern will take courage--but perhaps even more needed is simple determination to do the job without delay, using the skills and facilities already available.

The plan any particular school district formulates will not be the "ultimate answer" to problems of separation; quite likely it will have imperfections. But to wait for the perfect desegregation plan to be created by some presently unknown genius is like debating, when building a school, about whether to make the building dedication a formal or informal program even as wet mortar hardens and bricks crumble while waiting to be put together to make the building.

The children can't wait for all their elders to overcome bigotry and prejudice. They are growing and learning now. What they learn, and whether they learn it together, in classrooms where there is respect for and understanding of the differences among the family of man, or separately, fearing and distrusting each other, will determine the course of our nation.

The End